

3 March 1959

BACKGROUND FOR NSC BRIEFING ON THE SUDAN

The Ansar religious sect numbers some 1,500,000 and is headed by Sayyid Abdul el Rahman al Mahdi ~~1948~~. Especially strong among the warlike tribes of the western Sudan, the Ansar might be able to assemble a para-military force as large as 4,000 men. The Ansar is tied closely to the Umma political party (former prime minister Khalil is Ansar, and most of the Umma political strength is outside the major cities).

The Khatmia religious sect also numbers about 1,500,000 and is headed by Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani ~~1948~~. A large part of its membership is in the major cities. The Khatmia is tied primarily to the People's Democratic Party, although a considerable number of its members belong to the larger National Unionist Party.

Political parties

The Abboud military government has formally outlawed political parties, but the party leaders continue to have considerable potential influence. Before the 17 November military coup, the two largest parties were the Umma and the National Unionist, having about an equal number of supporters.

The Umma, the party of former prime minister Khalil, is very conservative, sharply anti-Egyptian, and in favor of maintaining close ties with the Western powers.

The National Unionist Party, The party of earlier prime minister al-Azhari, is less conservative, neutralist in foreign policy, but has elements which are pro-Egyptian. Several of its leaders are receiving clandestine subsidy payments from the UAR embassy.

The smaller People's Democratic party was in rather uneasy parliamentary coalition with the Khalil government. It is less conservative than the Umma, and more neutralist; a few of its leaders are also recipients of Egyptian stipends.

The Southern Liberal party is the only other party of significance. It represents the negroid tribal elements in the three southern provinces. Its leaders stand for a greater degree of independence and autonomy for the Southern Region of the Sudan and usually advocate a shift from union to federation of south with north.

The Sudanese army

Army strength is ^{17,838}~~12,300~~. It is divided into five regional commands (Northern, Western, Central, Eastern and Southern), plus the Khartoum garrison which includes an armored group. Headquarters units for logistics, engineering and training are also located in the Khartoum-Omdurman area.

A scheduled rotational movement of battalions from the various regional commands in the northern part of the country to relieve similar battalions attached to the southern command gave the Commanders of the Northern and Eastern Commands their opportunity to attempt the coup.

The total strength of the various Sudanese police forces is 8,000.